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MAGE
FROM CALVINISM TO UNITARIANISM

ALEX. WEBSTER

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Theology

My Pilgrimage from Calvinism to Unitarianism

AN ACCOUNT OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

BY

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PREFACE.

The First Edition of 'My Pilgrimage from Calvinism' was issued in 1889. It was soon exhuasted, and a second and third edition were issued the same year. In 1893 a fourth edition was published. The fifth edition is now issued in view of the fresh interest given to theological questions in Scotland by the decision of the House of Lords in the case between the 'Free Church' and the 'United Free Church.'

The McQuaker Trustees (at whose suggestion the present edition is published) deem it appropriate that an Experience of the straitness of the Free Church, painfully felt more than forty years ago, by one who was a member of that Church, should be reproduced at a time when the bondage of dogmatic creeds is so acutely realized, and spiritual bewilderment experienced all over Scotland.

The 'pilgrim,' in his dearly prized freedom, is fain to hope that, after her sixty years of creedal constriction, the Church of his youth will wisely choose 'the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.'

A. W.

Aberdeen, *September*, 1904.

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The late Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone on Unitarians.

'We should not be hastily led by antagonism of opinion to estimate lightly the influence which a school limited like this in numbers may exercise on the future. For, if they are not rulers, they rule those who are. They belong to the class of thinkers and teachers; and it is from within this circle, always, and even in the large organisations, a narrow one, that go forth the influences which one by one form the minds of men, and in their aggregate determine the course of affairs, the fate of institutions, and the happiness of the race.'

CHAPTER I.

EARLY TRAINING FOR MY RELIGIOUS JOURNEY—BOYISH DIFFICULTIES AND DOUBTS ABOUT THE WAY.

THE words of the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, so full of pathetic admonition about remembering 'all the way by which the Lord thy God led thee in the wilderness,' come freshly to my mind as I call to remembrance the course of my spiritual pilgrimage. I was familiar with them in early boyhood, and they, along with the words of the three chapters that precede and the three that follow, had always a curious fascination for my boyish imagination. They come to my mind now with a fuller significance.

That graphic rehearsal of an exodus, a wandering, and a settlement in 'a large and pleasant place,' with their wonderful providential accompaniments, which no hearer could have heard without having had his soul deeply thrilled, readily lends itself, in a metaphorical way, to the

depictment of personal spiritual experience. Every soul that has come to intelligent relations with the Moral Spirit of the Universe, shaped for itself in thought the august Authority whose commands are inwoven with the religious elements of consciousness, and reached the position of rational religion, has had its exodus, its sojourn in the wilderness, its time of wandering, suffering and fighting.

By common conditions of life, men are in bondage to ancestral and conventional modes of thought and action. Each generation is born in circumstances which environ it with dictatorial authority. The preceding generations have a mortgage upon it. The fact that it is their child seems to require it to be their copyist. All their interests press upon its life and oblige it to follow in their steps. We may say that for each generation the past is an Egypt, the power of which is as a Pharoah refusing to let it go to find its own way of life.

But the power of the past is hurtful only when it is allowed to supersede and enslave the power of the present. We cannot do without the past. We are its children and its inheritors. Its ideas and institutions do not come to us to be perpetuated in the form in which they arrive, but to be developed, corrected, and transmitted with augmented truthfulness and purer power. The present is our vantage ground whereon it is our

business to review the past and plan the future. On that vantage ground we stand in the same relationship to the Divine as did the men of the past. Their relation to God did not dissolve ours; their thinking did not take away our right to think in our turn: their leaving-off did not deprive us of our privilege to progress.

Each generation should have its own exodus, make its own efforts after truth, and seek for its own Canaan. To each there comes the Divine command—'Get thee out of the place of prejudice and dogmatism, out of the house of intellectual bondage.' And the generation is false to its opportunity and its trust, that does not deliberately set itself in line with the progressive forces in thought and conduct.

Likewise to the individual man there comes the same duty and call. It is each man's business to formulate his own religious belief, to discover his own proper relationship to God, to take hold of life with his own faculties. Each man has the right to his own intellectual standing in religion and his own spiritual connection with God. Each successive man is a fresh instrument of expression through which God seeks to express Himself, a new form in which the Divine desires to be more fully incarnated. When a man does not make religion a personal matter, apply his own faculties to the ascertainment of religious truth, and realize life in God by the sanctification of his own endow-

ments, he stultifies himself spiritually, and hinders the revelation of God in humanity. If he accepts religious ideas on traditional authority, acquiesces without understanding or rational consideration in current opinions, and joins in conventional religious practices without personal conviction, he makes himself a parrot, an echo, a slave. It is the duty of every man to seek to pass from the Egypt of superstition to the Canaan of rational belief, and until he has earnestly endeavoured to do that, he has not put his manhood into his religion.

In describing the way by which I passed out of the Egypt of Traditionalism into the region of personal conviction, I wish to be as unegotistic as I can possibly be. I boast not of the results of my pilgrimage, for they appear to me to be but the natural outcome of the exercise of the ordinary mental faculties on religious subjects, results by no means singular, but such as have been experienced by many who do not care to confess them. I do not pose as an exemplary pilgrim, or claim to have accomplished an extraordinary feat of spiritual travel, or to be entitled to any credit or praise for having arrived at the place where I am. I feel that I have been led by a native tendency of mind, by spiritual predisposition, by circumstances and influences which I cannot call other than providential. While I am conscious that I early set myself

deliberately to seek the real truth, I claim no merit for using my intellectual faculties as earnestly and thoroughly as I could. I speak simply as one who has gone through a certain course of thought and experience in religion, and who seeks, by reviewing it, to help others to think and come to true conclusions. I know that there are numbers of men—young men especially—constantly impelled to undertake such a pilgrimage as I have gone through, but knowing not which way to go, are afraid to take the first step, and who, if they start at all, either are pulled back again, stray into by-paths, or go stumbling on in an unsure, circular, and misty fashion.

I have gone through the various regions that lie between Calvinism and Unitarianism anxiously, observantly, and laboriously, and I may say without boasting I know what every step in the journey means. I know what it is to have felt the wondrous, yea the awful, impulse to start, the thrilling in the ear of conscience of the Divine command—'Get thee out of the land of ancestral tradition into a land which I will show thee and into which I will lead thee.' I know what it is to have dallied with that command; to have been afraid to strap the pilgrim's burden on to the mind and take the first step away from inbred ideas; to have wandered in desert places and fallen into many a slough of uncertainty and of error; to have walked long in darkness

and despair, and, therefore, can tell intending pilgrims how to beware of these, and how those who have lost themselves by the way may get into the right path. At least I can tell why I gave up Calvinism—what were my difficulties with it and my objections to it, and why I took my spiritual abode in the rationalistic region of Unitarianism. The telling of these things may be helpful.

I wish to say here that although the passing from Calvinism to Unitarianism involves a change of theological conception it does not involve a change of religion. Religion, wherever it really exists, has but one essence and cannot be changed. It is essentially reverence for the life-giving and life-sustaining Power of the Universe, worship of the Infinitely Powerful, Wise, and Good. The *conception* of that Power may change, but if religious feeling be kept at all it consists of reverence of, and a desire for, at-one-ment with that Power. There are many theologies, many conceptions of God, but there is only one religion.

The change in the conception of God involved in the passage from Calvinism to Unitarianism does not, as is commonly supposed, involve any loss of religious feeling, or of anything essential to religion. In fact, it involves a heightening, a purification, and an intensification of religious feeling, and a more earnest regard for the essentialities of religion. I believe in God, in Revelation,

in Incarnation, in Inspiration, in Atonement, in Regeneration, in Immortality, more firmly, and I think more truly, now than I did before. These are now more real, more vital, more essential than they ever were. In becoming a Unitarian, I did not seek to become less but more religious, and if I had ever felt that Unitarianism deadened, weakened, or in any way impaired the religious susceptibilities of the soul I would have renounced it. I embraced it, and I remain in touch with it, because it supplies me with the best object of religion, the best reasons for religion, and the best motives for religious life.

I have not lost respect for the Bible in becoming a Unitarian; on the contrary, I place a higher value on it as a means of religious guidance than I did when I believed in its plenary inspiration, and I feel also, that with new thoughts of Jesus Christ, I owe a higher and more faithful allegiance to him as a religious examplar than I owed when I regarded him as the second Person of the Trinity.

I have travelled to quite another region of thought, and left behind me all the traditionary dogmas in which I was bred, yet my religious faith is not dissolved, but is, if I know my own mind, firmer, and higher, and clearer than ever. I am not aware that I have suffered any spiritual damage on account of my pilgrimage. Pilgrims may be sure that the earnestness of the soul to know and live the truth will preserve it from

all damage in its wanderings and buffetings. 'In the very lowest order of shell animals there is a remarkable provision made, not merely for the reparation of injuries, but for the restoration of the typical form when the disc has been so much broken as to destroy the form completely—a provision for the maintenance of the perfected model; the reparative process being carried on alike in the "simple," the "duplex," and the "complex' types, upon the plan characteristic of each.' Surely such a provision exists for souls as well as for shells! Let the soul reverence its endowments, and use them according to their holiest law and highest capacity and it will be safe from harm. Earnest inquiry, radical thinking, rational believing never yet harmed any soul; these are the natural protectors of the spiritual life. The soul that does not enquire, that does not think, that has no rational belief, is the deformed, the diseased, the dead soul.

Now I have to describe my spiritual Egypt. As I set myself to do so, the fountains of memory fill with overpowering remembrances. I have to restrain my feelings as they swell upon me, for all that was dear in home and boyhood's world comes back with the flood. I wish to speak with the deepest respect of what I have called my spiritual Egypt, for though it became Egypt to me, it was a good land to those who dwelt in it. We would not do justice to the Egypt of the

Pharaohs if we did not admit that there was truth, and goodness, and beauty of life in it. It was not good for the Israelites to remain in it, but they had no monopoly of righteousness and virtue. The Egyptian character, judged by its own circumstances, was worthy of admiration. Nowhere else in their time can there be found a loftier theology, a more devout religion, and a purer morality than the Egyptians had. They were a learned, diligent, and influential race, and the Israelites were all the better for their connection with them. Moses, who was learned in all their learning, while he could not endure their despotism, could not but acknowledge his indebtedness to them.

And so in my own case, though I gave up Calvinism as an intellectual despotism to which I could not submit, I am aware that through it I inherited some virtues of soul. I was born and bred among Calvinists of the strictest sort, men and women in whose very rigidness and severity there was piety. As I think of them now I am reminded of the worship of ancestors which evolutionists declare to be the germ of the idea of immortality. I am sensible of a feeling for some of my ancestors approaching to worship, for I have an indelible impression of their integrity. I know that they were as upright and devout men and women as could be found in their parish, and I could not endure the consciousness that

in departing from their theology I had departed from their piety and morality. Indeed, they had such an enthusiasm for truth and well-doing that I do not think their shades will disown me, though in my search for truth I have travelled in ways in which they did not walk.

My father's family were connected with the Original Secession Church, and my mother's with the Established, and then with the Free Church. The Original Secession Church was the strictest of all the sects theologically and politically. It held to the severest Calvinism, and at the same time kept most rigidly to the doctrine of state non-interference in matters pertaining to religion. The members of it were sturdy Covenanters, the descendants of men who had fought for Christ's Crown and Covenant. They were the sternest of Protestants, the most strenuous upholders of the right of private judgment. Rigid believers in the plenary inspiration of the Bible, and in the authority of the Confession of Faith as an exposition of the doctrines of Scripture, they were very jealous of everything that tended to oppress the conscience or in any way trench upon religious rights. The hatred of external dictation in religion which I believe was strong in my grandfather's spirit is, I believe, one of my spiritual inheritances. I cannot recollect him, for he died when I was very young, on a Communion Sunday, while officiating as an elder, almost with the elements

of the Sacrament in his hands; but I am glad that I inherit from him the congenital dislike I have to dictation whether of State or Church. He held that the State should stand off from the conscience; I simply go a step further and say the Church should stand off also. The conscience ought to be left perfectly free, within the lines of natural influences, to believe according to its own convictions. The Protestant thoroughness, then, which carried me right forward to Unitarianism, I owe to the ancestor whose name I bear.

Circumstances which I need not explain caused me to be brought up from infancy till my tenth year with my grandmother and aunt, my father's mother and sister. My aunt kept a school, and was a woman of superior intelligence and sincere piety. It was under her influence that my early religious ideas and habits were formed. I don't remember learning to read, butI r ecollect that in my seventh year I could read the Bible, and was set to get large pieces of it off by heart. My aunt's library, which had been my grandfather's, consisted chiefly of theological works and books of Church history. The only books of stories in it were Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Holy War*. These, and especially the latter, I read and re-read before I was ten. I was early taught a habit of reading. Every Sabbath I had to read aloud, and the books from which I read were

Baxter's *Saints' Rest*, Boston's *Fourfold State*, and Rutherford's *How to begin and end the day with God*, and the Bible, of course. I did not relish these books of Calvinistic divinity, and always felt it penance to take them in hand, though I dared not refuse to read.

Twice to Church and once to the Sunday School was the inflexible Sunday rule. I had also to attend a Wednesday class kept by the minister's wife, being taught the Shorter Catechism and the Psalms in metre; and at which I was, at the age of nine, the happy winner of sixpence for the most perfect repetition of the 119th Psalm. Whether there was then a poetic instinct in my soul or not, I liked the Psalms while I disliked the questions. The Psalms I learnt easily; the questions were a task; but I had to learn them without a will as the Israelites had to make bricks without straw. All these things were thought necessary to the education of a child's conscience, and I am well aware that, coupled with the restraints put upon me, they did give me a sense of responsibility and a seriousness of disposition which I regard as the most precious things that any child could have imparted to him. An American philosopher has said, 'Nearly all the moral sentiment and graces are late in maturing in the boy. He has no proper self-respect till past his majority. Of course there are exceptions, but they are mostly windfalls. The

good boys die young.' I suppose I could not have been over-good, because I outlived boyhood, but my earliest impressions are those of a severe moral sentiment. I know that my conscience was developed before my intellect, and considerably at the expense of my heart. I was hardly allowed to play at all or to indulge in any frivolity. I was constantly *kept in*, and had to read, or listen quietly to the talk of my seniors, which was usually serious. I don't remember having had any toys or any amusement indoors; but only the having these books to read and hearing solemn conversation.

The thing most deeply impressed upon my mind was a weekly prayer meeting held in certain houses alternately. At these meetings theological questions were regularly discussed, and experiences recounted. My aunt, who was a keen theologian and a woman of spiritual capacity, was always present, and I had to accompany her, for she was lame and used to lean on my shoulder in walking. Every week I was thus present at a theological discussion, and I well remember the faces of the men and women who were the prominent talkers. Serious, pious, good persons were they all, most of them very grave. It was the weightiest things that they discussed—foreordination, election, reprobation, or some other point of Calvinism; and they were so constituted or constrained that it was the severest view that

they leaned to. Very eerie talk I used to think it was as I sat on a low stool in the room, lit only by a rushlight lamp, listening to it all. Ere I was ten I was familiar with all the great dogmatic terms; and even something of the significance of them as they were used had entered my mind. I know I was afraid to fall asleep while the proceedings went on, and I remember occasions when I was keenly interested in the interchange of thought which took place. If I had any other inclinations they were completely subdued by discipline in respect for my elders and regard for my aunt's wishes. I believe I was sometimes tempted to revolt against the authority which required me to sit indoors thus occupied on a summer evening when others of my age were playing happily outside; but I dared not openly rebel. I fancy, however, that these smothered feelings were the beginnings of a revulsion which arose in my mind at a later stage.

Such was my religious training up till the age of ten. Looking back on it now it appears to me to have been mainly of a repressive sort. It was decidedly suppressive so far as natural feelings were concerned. There was no outlet for boyish emotion except in religion, and even in that it was subdued by *fear* of God. The feelings had to turn in upon themselves and absorb or prey upon each other. This gave an inwardness of temperament and a sharpness to conscience which was

premature. I had a musical proclivity as an inheritance from my father, but it got no indulgence. It is said 'the brain of a song bird is even much larger in proportion than that of the greatest human monarch, and its life is correspondingly intense and high strung.' I sometimes wonder how it would have been with me if I had had a musical instead of a theological schooling. But my father's instrument, which I used to look upon and handle with delight, was banished, and the Catechism remained.

I suppose that such influences as then existed in the little Aberdeenshire village hardly exist anywhere now. Probably I was singular in my boyish experiences even then. However, I have a decided conviction that that was not fitting religious education. I value highly the gravity, the piety, the intensity connected with it. I respect its tendency to deepen the conscience, but it is all too premature, too solemn, and too repressive for a child. It tends to produce disproportionate and unhealthy characters. The conscience cannot be rightly fed at the expense of the heart. A man all conscience is an unnatural man, a cruel moral despot. A conscience that has height but not breadth is simply a whip-handle. It needs a cultured heart and an educated mind to keep a conscience in health.

The radical fault of Calvinism as a system in its practical effect is that it makes men conscien-

tious without making them reasonable and sympathetic. It assumes certain things which are in their very nature unreasonable, calls them mysteries, and then forces them upon the conscience against reason and affection. 'In the Norse legend, Allfadir did not get a drink of Mimir's spring (the fountain of wisdom) until he left his eye in pledge.' Likewise to be a Calvinist a man must give up his heart. Calvinism is a system which crucifies all natural affection, and succeeds only by making men hard and stern. Its theology has the effect of repressing the softer and sweeter emotions and of making religion consist of a paralyzing fear. I remember how I used to lie in the box bed, into which I was shut alone, and tremble when I thought of God. I could not say with Faber,—

> 'O God! who wert my childhood's love,
> My boyhood's pure delight,
> A presence felt the livelong day,
> A welcome fear at night.'

I dreaded God too much to love him, and had it not been for my grandmother's tenderness I should have had nothing then to redeem me from agonizing terror. On the prayer meeting nights I sometimes lay awake restless and fanciful, wondering if heaven was a place where people sat discussing theological questions constantly. I thought if it were, I would rather not be there. I wanted a heaven of cheerful occupation, not of solemn debate. And so, though those earnest

men and women, who were so severely intent upon solving the riddles which divines had made, live in my memory amidst respect, I think their intellectual anxieties were misdirected, and that in the fear of having a bad conscience they narrowed and devitalized their heart. I have an impression which is cut deep into my soul that their stern, repressive, loveless theology was not good for a child. I venerate those of whom I speak, with their solemn piety, their conscientious anxiety, their burdened religion, but I feel that their atmosphere was not that which childhood should have breathed and that their sanctuary was a prison to a child. As I look back upon the first decade of my life it appears to me to have been spent in a cell, and I do not wonder that in later years I sought for a freer air in which the intellect and the conscience, touched by love, could rise into sweet life.

At the age of ten I left home to go one hundred and seventy miles distant to live with an uncle and aunt who also were Calvinists, and members of the Free Church. Taking stock of myself in a revisionary manner now, I perceive that the influences which had moulded me had given me a serious disposition. I had an inbred terror of untruth and of unconscientiousness of every kind, and was disposed to be rigidly religious. I knew the letter of the Bible well, and could readily turn to any passage in

it. I could repeat the Shorter Catechism, with proofs, from beginning to end, and could say most of the Psalms and Paraphrases. I was even then fonder of reading than of playing, owing to the bias I had received; and I suppose I was regarded as a pious boy.

But of my natural relation to God as manifested in the Universe I knew nothing. Nature was nothing to me. I had not been directed to look at its phenomena or to take any interest in its objects. What my human faculties were for I had not been taught. How to use these religiously I did not know. I simply was crammed with the words of the Bible and the Catechism; and that was all. That was reckoned as religious knowledge. My new relatives were even more strict than the others, and the same sort of influences were continued. But change of scene and conditions set my mind in new directions. The town in which I then lived was much larger than the village I had left, and everything was different and novel. There I came upon a new set of books, and the wondrous world of literature was opened to me. I got hold of a series of nursery stories, and read them with avidity. I got access to periodicals with serial stories, and to novels, and read them in secret at night. The stories were bad—the very worst, perhaps, that could have come my way, being those in *Reynolds' Miscellany* written by G. M. Reynolds. They

introduced me to a new world and gave new sensations. But they were contraband, and when it was discovered I had got hold of them, they were taken away. Still, books were my delight, and happening, about the age of fourteen, to get hold of one of Dickens' novels, my taste for such writings was changed, and I hungered for more of them. But I was not allowed to read them, and had religious stories given to me instead. I was sent to the minister's class with a view to becoming a communicant. In that class I went through the Confession of Faith, being obliged to get its words by heart. That class was the dreariest thing conceivable for a boy of fifteen, but I kept at it conscientiously up to a certain point.

For five years I was subjected to that repressive system. I was put to a business which occupied me from half-past seven in the morning till eight at night, and on Saturdays till eleven. Play was out of the question, and my only relaxation was found in books. Much of the spare time at my command was spent in preparing for the minister's class and the Sunday School, and I was in danger of becoming morbidly religious. Indeed, so intolerable did my bondage become that in my soul I revolted from it and became a confirmed rebel. I dared not show my rebellion, for I knew I should be unmercifully beaten, but I went through my theological tasks sullenly.

At length deliverance came. At about sixteen years of age I set up a home for my mother, and, with her coming, affection came, and my heart began to live. Till that time the strain of spiritual life had been on my conscience, but then it was relieved by the action of the heart. I still, in obedience to my aunt, attended the minister's class, but I had begun to feel and to think. Familiarity with the Bible was kept up by my searching it for answers to the Prize Questions given in the *Band of Hope Review*, of whose prize I was, at sixteen, the fortunate gainer, in a world-wide competition.

In the freedom of my mother's presence I left one Free Church and went to another where was a more genial minister. In the vestry of his Church, I used to meet along with others, on Sunday mornings for Bible Reading and Exposition, and Prayer. It was in writing papers for that meeting that I first realized that I did not believe in certain dogmas which I had been taught. I had been previously preparing for such writing by joining with two companions in composing essays to be criticised by each other. From moral subjects we went to theological; and we not only wrote on these, but took long walks together earnestly discussing such questions as Election and Damnation. We discovered and confessed to each other that we were not Calvinists; but to Arminianism was as far as we dared go

(one of my companions was a Morisonian). We gathered courage and expressed our views at the Sabbath morning meeting, but as they were immature, we were easily silenced. For a long time we three doubters met and conferred together. We dared not take anyone into our confidence, and thought greatly in the dark. We did not know where to find light and guidance.

At length, on the pressure of my aunt to make me join the Church, I yielded so far as to begin the study of the *Communicant's Catechism*, but I had not gone far when I revolted against the whole thing. I told my aunt plainly that I did not and could not believe in Election and Eternal Torment, and would not become a Communicant. I was then between sixteen and seventeen years of age, and had resolved that I would not in any way commit myself theologically. My aunt was greatly troubled, and forbade me to go with sceptical companions. I refused to give them up, as I was really the worst sceptic of the three. She argued the question with me, but it was of no use: my newly released feelings would not let me credit that there was any penalty for free inquiry, or Eternal Torment for those who could not believe the dogmas of orthodoxy. In spite of the Catechism and the Confession of Faith I secretly cherished the thought that God would not torture me for following the leadings of my own holiest feelings. But I could not get any assurance

in my heresy. Everything around me was orthodox, and I was prejudiced against heterodoxy. I could not lay my hand on a book that could help me ; each one was Calvinistic. Arminianism was at hand, but it was unpopular, and I had just then no taste for a new controversy. There were, as I know now, two Unitarian families in the town, but I knew nothing of Unitarianism. I was completely helpless. I knew not how to get out of the net of Calvinism, though I felt every mesh of it to be galling. I read the Bible afresh only to find that I could make no more of it than I had already done. I had no clue to its true interpretation, and though I eagerly held to some of its clearer and sweeter utterances, I had to admit that there was much in it that seemed to substantiate orthodoxy.

But one thing I had done in my youthful earnestness was to make up my mind that the Catechism and the Confession of Faith were misleading in their Scriptural proofs. I examined the proofs given and found them in many cases to be no proofs at all. Passages were quoted which had no reference to the assertions made, and which could not even be twisted into proofs. These documents I gave up entirely, and turned with more hope to my Bible. But I was not able to master its meaning. I was most puzzled with the writings of Paul, and could not tell what to make of his terms. Even Jesus was a

puzzle because I knew not how to read his words except in the light of the idea of the dogma of his Deity.

And another thing on which I made up my mind ere I was seventeen was that I would not say 'I believe' until I was intelligently convinced. I agreed with myself to a suspension of judgment. I felt that certain theological dogmas were wrong, but I could not give a logical reason for my feeling. I had not managed, though I had tried hard, to make a theology for myself. I had the vaguest possible idea of God. I may say in Faber's words :—

> 'I know not what I thought of Thee,
> What picture I had made
> Of that eternal Majesty
> To whom my childhood prayed.'

My philosophy was nebulous, my religion was an undefined emotion, and the contents of my mind were traditional ideas which I had not verified or assimilated. I kenw not where I stood or what I ought to believe. I had walked in the path in which I was set by force of external compulsion, and had not come to myself. But another change was near. New influences, wider knowledge, and clear self-understanding showed me where I stood and set me on the track of truth.

Here, however, I must halt for the present. I close with some reflections which may be useful to parents and those who are in earnest about religion. My own experience leads me to condemn

the common theological training to which children are subjected. Using the words of Dr. Martineau —'It is, I am persuaded, a fatal thing, when we men and women, who make all the catechisms, and shape all the doctrines, and invent all the language of Christian faith, to force our adult religion, with its meditative depth, upon the heart of childhood, not yet capacious enough to take it in. The child needs but the fresh air and pure nourishment of life; give him not the pharmacopœia of theology instead of the bread of heaven. Disturb him not with unprofitable "Evidences": they are burdensome as the statutes-at-large to the heart of spontaneous justice—misplaced as a court of chancery in heaven. . . . . If you would prepare, not a mere baby-house, but a right noble structure of faith, in which the soul shall have a life interest, you will not only lay the foundation broad and deep, but avoid filling it with mean and perishable materials the parts of which the childish eye may see the surface, but which only the manly thought can build in strength. The unnoticed outline of system may be so drawn, that painful and deforming erasures hereafter may be spared; and by mere expansion of the old boundary, and insertion of new beauty and new wealth, the earnest veracity of the philosopher may be but the glorified piety of the child.'

It appears to me that a child should be religiously enlisted through the affections. Let his

wonder regarding natural objects and movements be transformed into sympathy with the divineness of Nature, his susceptibility turned to the ordinary, sublime, and beautiful things of the world, his emotions set so that they will be touched by the good and noble in humanity; and the spirit of religion will be in him.

The early years of a child's life are the most precious for educational purposes, and if these are misused, as I believe they generally are under the present system of religious training, the mischief can hardly be undone. In my own case the years of my childhood and boyhood were worse than wasted, and in youth I had to unlearn what I had been taught, and begin learning all over again. I believe it is possible to train children religiously so that they will not need to unlearn anything: to teach them such ideas and evoke in them such emotions as their mature reason will approve. It is a duty we owe to our children and to the coming generations to see that we do not set them wrong at first and give them the trouble and pain of unlearning and pulling down. But it can only be done by beginning on a rational basis, and by taking the child-nature on the line of its normal life and unfoldment.

To those who are just beginning to ask what they ought to believe, whose understanding is opening, and desire a faith which is a result of their own inquiry and realization, I would say,

trust your own faculties; assume that each is to be implicitly trusted within its own sphere: 'the senses, as reporters of the outward world; the understanding, in the ascertainment of laws and the interpretation of nature; the reason and conscience, in the ordering of life, the discernment of God, the ordering of religion.' These are your human endowments, in reverencing and educating which you take the first step in religion. Let not any authority stand between you and them; they are the only means whereby you can find God. No revelation of God can declare anything to you except through them; no word or movement of his can reach your consciousness if they are not sensitive and responsive. 'Dismiss whatever insults your own soul.' Do not fear that if you cannot believe to-day you will be punished to-morrow. Put the thought of consequences away; it is not your business to concern yourself with them, but only with being true to the best you know at the moment. Overcome the temptation to profess belief in fashionable and profitable things. Do not dishonour your conscience by any pretence or make-believe. Set your face to the narrow, upward way; for—

> 'He, that ever following high commands,
> On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
> Through the long gorge to the far light has won
> His path upward, and prevailed,
> Shall find the toppling Crags of Duty scaled
> Are close upon the shining table-lands
> To which our God himself is moon and sun.'

CHAPTER II.

MY EXPERIENCES WITH ARMINIANISM, ATHEISM, SWEDENBORGIANISM, AND BROAD CHURCHISM.

On starting to review the second stage of my religious pilgrimage, I am reminded of words said to have been uttered by Christ over which I used to ponder with a mental anxiety which sometimes became agony: 'Think not I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. . . . And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.'

I had been touched by the sword of Christ. It had cut the arteries of thought that bound me to my ancestors, and set me free to think for myself and form a belief according to the decisions of my reason. But I felt as a severed head may

be supposed to feel when separated from the trunk, being still alive and conscious; or, to use a more fitting simile, I felt as a seed may be imagined to feel when it is suddenly dashed out of its birth-pod and left to find the way to germinate and grow. I was conscious that the mystic weapon of conviction had touched the seed-pod in which I had been reared and made me spring out to grow in accordance with the essential character of my own endowments. I realized that I was for ever cut off from ancestral thought-connections and had to find new mental ties and begin a new life. I was between two influences, one behind, pulling back, and one before, drawing forward. Reverence for my ancestors was strong and I fain would have lingered in the region of their thought. I knew that they were upright, sincere, pious people, and it seemed presumption in me to think that the ideas in which their good character had been nourished were wrong. Their sterling virtues seemed to declare that their beliefs were right. I asked myself if my revulsion from their beliefs was not an evil waywardness on my part, a wildness or whimsicality of intellect to which youth in its exuberance was subject. I knew that if virtue were the end of religion, I could hardly ever, with any view that I might have, attain a higher integrity than theirs. And there came also this thought,—what light or right had I by which I was entitled to throw off the

authority of the Catechism and the Confession of Faith! Were not these standards drawn up by men of learning and piety with a sincere desire to set forth the doctrines of the Bible? Who or what was I to take it upon me to say I will not believe them? Over and over again these questions came forcibly to my mind and caused me hours of very serious thought. I hesitated in deference to ancestral influence, considered and reconsidered, feeling that, however far I might go from the beliefs of my ancestors, I could never cast off my respect for their uprightness, but must always revere the spirit of their character.

But there was one thing which, though but an unverified impression at the time, gave me confidence to follow my own conscience. I saw in a dim manner that those whose influence had gone deepest into my soul were really feeling their own way in theological matters. They were undecided, troubled, groping with regard to many things. I overheard their doubts, their misgivings, and their cries for more light. Moreover, I discerned that their beliefs were forced; they were not such as they would have formed if left to the guidance of their affections. Their heart rebelled while their intellect acquiesced. They wished to believe otherwise, but an external authority dictated, and they had to yield. They dared not trust their sweetest thoughts, nor credit their tenderest feelings. Their heart had

to be put on the cross. They were victims of the system which claimed their allegiance. Then, on the other hand, I felt that I had all the rights and responsibilities of a living man. I had my own individual endowments, my own work to do, my own life to live, my own relationship to God to make good. Though the inheritor of the past, I was not bound to repeat it. I had come as a new soul into a new opportunity, and had to put my own interpretation on things. I felt that whatever else I had to do, I had to take hold of my own faculties, and interpret and consecrate them ; I could not surrender my reason in deference to any ecclesiastical or other human authority, but must keep it as the means of judging all human authority. In short, I could not begin religion by effacing myself. My instinct of intellectual self-preservation told me that my business was to sanctify myself. I believed that God needed *me* for something, and that I had to stand for something definite. But what that thing was I could not then discover. I wished to follow Christ, but I could not find his leading. I was willing to take up my cross, but I could not discern in what shape it came to me.

Thus for long I halted between two influences. But at length I decided that, come of it what might I would follow my conscience, for with it, I believed there came to me divine leading. I heard a voice say to me,

'Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find
A thousand regions in your mind
Yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be
Expert in home-cosmography.'

My first great decision was taken about seventeen, and it was, *to trust conscience*, to take every means of enlightening and culturing it, and to trust it implicitly. Allegiance to it was the primary duty. The authority of ancestors, of contemporaries, of all things ought to be tested by its judgment. Imperfect and fallible though it was, it was still the means of verification divinely given. I felt that my religious responsibility did not arise out of the ideas which had been taught me, nor out of my having a Bible put into my hand, but originated in the fact that I was a conscious being, having certain bodily and spiritual powers, placed along with my fellows amidst the manifestations of the Divine for an intelligible life-end.

One other thing I had determined in my own mind, viz., that if I ought to worship God, He must be worthy of worship—that is to say, my idea of him must be such as would call forth worshipful feelings. I perceived that God must be perfectly good, and, therefore, I had given up the idea of Election and Reprobation; but how to prove to myself that He was actually good was my difficulty. My theological castle was in the air, and I did not know how to put foundations under it. I knew that the Bible said 'God is good to all,' 'God is love,' etc., but I wished to

know what rational basis there was for these statements. I was utterly ignorant of the art of thinking, and could not tell where to start my mind. I had been crammed with *words* about Him, but how to discover what veracity they had I could not tell.

Such was my state of mind when, at the age of seventeen, I went to live in Glasgow. It was a step into a new world. Everything in the great city was larger and more impressive than anything I had previously experienced. One of the companions of whom I spoke in the previous chapter went into the city with me, and we lodged together; so that I was not altogether lonely. But new acquaintances and associations set my mind to work in new ways. For some time my custom was to spend Sunday at home with my mother in the town where I had left her, and so my old Church connections were unbroken. I also kept on attending the Sunday morning meeting, and took my turn in conducting it.

I could not cast off the old chains, though I had to shift them a good deal to make them bearable. At last I removed my home to Glasgow, and after making a round of the Free and U.P. Churches (that was as wide as our training would then let us go), my companion and I took sittings in William Arnot's Church. Arnot was a genial preacher, had the reputation of being the best minister for young men, and he was fresh to me.

I became a Sunday School Teacher and a member of the Church. I was drifting mentally all the while, and trailing my anchor heavily. But Arnot's preaching, and the new society into which I was drawn in his Church, kept me from coming to myself. I could not break away from Church connections, and yet they were not satisfactory.

The curious thing was that I thought there was no help for me. I did not know that there were any religious bodies who disbelieved in Election and Eternal Torment. Everything beyond Orthodoxy was vague. I was an ecclesiastical dissenter by intelligence—having read all about the Disruption; but into theological controversy I had not gone. I had not as yet met with any heretical book, nor with any reference to heresy except of a condemnatory sort. My reading was exclusively orthodox, and if I knew of other books I was afraid to read them. Of Unitarianism I had heard or read nothing whatever. The Church I attended was within a stone's throw of St. Vincent Street Unitarian Church, but my attention was never called to that place. I was entirely pre-occupied with the things of my little religious circle, and had no time nor, indeed, much readiness for anything else.

But I came daily into contact with a man who had read and thought deeply. He had gone through all the sects and had thought himself out

of them all. He was a reverent rationalist, a believer in God in his own fashion, but without Church connection. At first I was shocked at him and drew aloof. He was not obtrusive of his opinions, and respected my reserve. But I treasured up the remarks he made, took note of the books he had read, and began to understand that there was a literature of sceptical philosophy and science of which I had not dreamed. By glimpses I perceived the character of that strange world which lay outside the one in which I moved. In the simplicity of my ignorance I had thought that the only existent, at least the only true system of thought and knowledge was formed by the Bible as the central luminary and books written to explain it, and that shone by light borrowed from it. But I now saw to my surprise quite another world of literature, into which I was eager to enter ; but still I did not know how.

My ignorance may seem strange to some, but when it is known that my schooling ceased at twelve, and that I had been fully occupied at business ever after, had moved in a very limited sphere, and hardly ever had a spare penny, my statement may be credited. But, in fact, my state of mind was that of thousands. And what even yet does orthodoxy lead the youth to believe? That all books beyond a very few—all that have not the stamp of orthodoxy—are bad and should not be read! I suppose that if you take the

average young man in orthodox circles anywhere to-day, you will find that he knows little or nothing of Darwin, Spencer, Tyndall, or such as these, beyond what he has heard from the pulpit, or read in his very evangelical periodical. Of heretics (so-called) such as Channing and Parker, or of such writers as Hume, Paine, and Ingersoll he hears only to shudder. All beyond his little circle is darkness and evil. Orthodoxy thus makes a cell round the youth in which his soul shuts itself up and calls it heaven.

It is a fatal mistake. The discovery of the literature of science was to me a surprise and a shock. It seemed to me that I had been deceived by orthodoxy. I had not been told of the scientific way of knowledge and Verification. I had not been led to expect to find great and good men outside the pale of orthodoxy, but to regard all out of it as immoral and lost persons. When I was first made aware of the existence of scientists, philosophers, and thinkers, who were as noble as any in the ranks of orthodoxy and yet were in opposite ranks, my faith in orthodoxy was sorrowfully shaken. I was so grieved that I had been so deluded that I could not for shame confess the delusion. But I determined to explore the new world and know what the scientists had to say. Still I was reticent and cautious. I could not take my new friend into my confidence, but resolved to keep eye and ear open.

By early association I was strongly attached to the Free Church, and was very reluctant to break away. But at the very first communion at which I sat down in Dr. Arnot's Church I became convinced that it was my duty to leave the Church, pending the inquiries I intended and required to make. I resolved that my first Communion should be my last, and I kept my resolution. I saw that I could not be at peace with myself till I had gone to the roots of things. I went to tell Dr. Arnot my determination. He opposed it, urged me to reconsider it and see him again. I did reconsider it, but only to become more determined. I went again to see him, and he gave me my Communion Ticket and his blessing.

Having thus cut myself adrift I determined to spend my Sundays and all my spare time in enquiry and study; to examine the principles of the various sects, go through the Bible afresh, follow science as far as I could, and at the end find out where I was theologically. I was resolved to search as long as it was necessary; and if I were led rationally even to Atheism, an Atheist I would be. 'It was said of Phidias's Jupiter seated on Olympus, that, were he ever to stand erect, the sudden uprising would rend asunder the vaulted roof of Heaven.' I felt as if my uprising had rent the roof of my religious faith, but yet I hoped the rent would be an

opening through which I could see upwards. Catechism and Confession, ecclesiastical and social influence, had made a roof of dogma and determent over my soul, and I could no longer endure it. I wanted to see and know for myself. Heine says, 'It is horrible when the bodies which we have created ask of us a soul. But it is still more horrible, more terrible, more uncanny, to create a soul, which craves a body and pursues us with that demand. The idea which we have thought is such a soul, and it allows us no peace until we give it a body, until we have brought it into actual being.' I had the idea of quite another God than the Deity of the Creeds, and of another way to Him than orthodoxy disclosed, but my idea had no body. The ghostly thought was terrible, and I had spiritual agonies with it which I cannot describe. These were all the more terrible because I had resolved to go forth on my search alone. I thought that if there was such a God as I imagined he would surely speak to me directly.

I began at the path nearest to me—at Arminianism, or as it was commonly called, Morisonianism. I went to Dr. Morison's own Church, and heard him and others preach. I got John Kirk's works and studied them, read controversies between Calvinists and Arminians, and connected myself with an E.U. Church in order to see what there really was in Arminianism.

I soon found that I had got out of the frying-

pan of dogmatism into the fire. There was an opinionativeness, a bigotry, a narrowness about Morisonians that I could not endure. Though I had given up Calvinism I respected its severe sincerities, and while I recognised in Arminianism much that was an improvement on Calvinism, I saw that it was not thorough and self-consistent. It halted where it should have proceeded. I was then most concerned with the dogma of eternal torment, and I at once eagerly examined the E.U. Declaration and Catechism to see what they had to say about it. To my surprise the old, abhorrent idea of eternal torment came up afresh. I found it set forth in the statement of doctrine and scheme of union drawn up by James Morison that 'we and all our fellow men are totally depraved. We are so guilty as to be hell deserving.' Quoted to prove that statement was *Eph.* ii. 3, words which say nothing about hell whatever. I found also in the Doctrinal Declaration the dogma of reprobation unmitigated, except that the doom of eternal torment was placed at the end instead of (as in Calvinism) at the beginning of the sinner's career. The Declaration spoke of 'the last resources of a wise benevolence' being expended on those who proved incorrigible and 'finally impenitent.' That pointed to a time when the Almighty would be without resources, and the all-loving would hate some, and I could not see how that could be. It made God subject to Satan,

powerless with the beings He had created, forced to occupy but a portion of his own Universe. I felt I could not worship such a Deity, because he was either short-sighted, powerless, or unjust. Either he did not foresee that he had made men for damnation, was unable to prevent it, or was not sufficiently just to save men from it, and in either case he was not perfect, and therefore was not worthy of worship. I wanted a God who was perfectly omniscient, omnipotent, and just.

On examining the *Evangelical Catechism*, by Dr. Morison, I found the following :—' Question 182. What will be the everlasting abode of those who live and die unholy ? Answer.—Those who live and die unholy will be dismissed into hell, to be there punished with the devil and his wicked angels for ever and ever. Question 184.—Why is it that the unholy must abide in woe for ever and ever ? Answer.—The unholy must abide in woe for ever and ever, because " without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins " ; and " for the sins which they commit after they leave the earth, Christ never did, and never will die." ' I asked myself can God change ? Can he abjure his own Fatherhood ? Is he not responsible for his children as long as they live ? I could not see that on God's part there could be any difference between present and future, or why, seeing there was redemption from sin now, there should not always be. Then the whole question of the

atonement was opened to me, and I put to myself the question, why did not Christ, being infinite, make an atonement for all time? If his death was infinite were not its results universal? How could there be a limit in time to the satisfaction of God arising out of that death? If Christ paid the whole penalty of sin, how could it be exacted again in an eternal hell? I felt that I must look further into the atonement and the Trinity—that, in fact, I could not confine my inquiry and concern to Reprobation merely. The more I examined Morisonianism the less I liked it. It resolved itself into a worthless quibble about fore-knowledge and free-will. It did not practically matter to me whether God's fore-knowledge is based on his fore-ordination or not, or whether man had free-will or not, so long as by Arminianism not one soul fewer than by Calvinism went to eternal misery. In short, the freedom which Arminianism gave men to damn themselves, became more abhorrent to me than the predestination of Calvinism which, before they were born, consigned them to torment; for the idea of God giving the power of self-damnation to his children was even worse than the idea of his using his own power to damn them.

I finally gave up Morisonianism as an incoherent, inconsequential, and incomplete system. I saw that in order to be logical and complete it needed to add to its three great universalities a fourth,

viz., the final salvation of all men; for if it be true, as it asserts, that the love of God the Father is the gift and sacrifice of Jesus to all men, everywhere, without distinction, exception, or respect of persons; that God the Son sacrificed himself as a true propitiation for the sins of the world; and that God the Holy Spirit applies to the souls of all men the provisions of divine grace—why should not all be finally saved? Why should we limit God's love to this world? Can he ever cease to be Father? Will there ever be a soul anywhere for whom he will not care?

While I give the Evangelical Union the credit of mitigating some of the difficulties created by Calvinism, I regard it as a lamentable instance of arrested development. If it had gone on to its own proper logical conclusions it would have become the Universalist, perhaps even the Unitarian, Church of Scotland; but it lost its opportunity and is now amongst the dying sects.[1]

I turned away from it with a pang. My examination of it had widened the field of my survey. I saw that I had to go to the very basis of theology and examine the whole grounds of religion. I therefore determined to discover what the Atheist had to say. I did not doubt the existence of a God, but I sought to know what kind of God there actually was. I had no fear of the results

[1] This was written before the union of the 'E.U's.' with the Congregationalists.

of inquiry, for I was in earnest to know the real truth. I went, therefore, to the Secular Hall, in which Dr. Sexton (then in his materialistic mood), was announced to lecture on Buchner's 'Force and Matter.' The place was dreadfully dingy and uninviting. There was a grossness about the audience which I did not like. I did not see any signs of the intelligence and culture I had hoped to find. The men looked dirty and the women coarse. There seemed to be a low moral temperature in the place, and I instinctively shuddered, and would have gone out had I not been determined to see the end. Perhaps I was prejudiced and over sensitive. A small choir, accompanied by a very wheezy harmonium, sang 'Where art thou, beam of light?' and my soul echoed *where indeed!* Dr. Sexton proceeded with his lecture in his glib, smart, dogmatic way. I was not then prepared to understand such a lecture, and most of it was gibberish to me, but my impression of it might have been expressed in words which I knew afterwards—'latest philosophers have proclaimed absolute atheism to be the last word of German philosophy. Relentlessly and with Bacchantic recklessness they tore aside the blue curtain from the heavens, and cried, "Behold! all the gods have flown, and there sits above only an old spinster with leaden hands and sorrowful heart—Necessity."'

It was to me a new sensation, and I felt *creepy*.

Discussion took place, and my mind seemed as if it were being torn to pieces as they worried each others' words. I looked round to see if I were not in a rat pit while terriers of philosophy sprang at the terms that each threw out. I came away with the impression that Atheism was as big a dogmatism as Calvinism or Arminianism, and that the Atheist was a flippant bigot (I give my impressions as they were ; they were modified afterwards). Though I was much shocked by what I heard in the Secular Hall, I went again and again, read all the secularistic literature I could lay my hands on, and weighed it as well as I could. I became a Secularist to the extent of being convinced that this world is the one with which we have presently to do, that all life is in every respect subject to natural law, and that we cannot know anything of life except by scientific investigation of phenomena. Through reading secularistic works I became for the first time aware of the nature of universal laws, of the process by which life was developed on our globe, of the hereditary and cosmic influences which affect character, and of many other things of which I had been totally ignorant. What I read in these works convinced me also that the Bible was a human production, and could be understood only in the light of the history of its composition. Secularistic influences also confirmed me in my thought of the supremacy of reason,

and the unsinfulness of rational inquiry and belief, though deemed heretical.

But with these results my obligations to Atheism ended. I saw that in combating the dogmatism of orthodoxy it became equally dogmatic; and of the two dogmatists I certainly preferred the orthodox one, simply because he had reverence and the emotion of worship while the other had little or none. It seemed to me as unreasonable to say, *there is no God*, or, *we cannot tell whether there is a God or not*, as to say, *there is a God, and everything about him is contained in the Bible.* I saw that in our thinking, we could neither get quit of ourselves nor of the Universe: these had to be acknowledged and accounted for, and it appeared to me that, when we acknowledged the order of Nature, the laws of life, the fact of continuous development, we could account for them only on the ground of Intelligence. Whether we call that Intelligence Force or Will, Matter or Spirit, or by no name at all, is not of much consequence except for counters of our thoughts; for if we call it Force it is Force that Wills, and if we call it Matter it is Matter that has Spirit or mind in it. The essential thing is not the name but the fact; and when once we recognize the fact our thought and our feeling regarding it will be unified: Atheist and Theist will be united in mind and heart in contemplating the reality.

The ridicule, still too common in Atheistic and

Agnostic circles, poured forth on God, Christ, the Bible, Religion, and Immortality always seemed to me to be unjust. An Atheist's laugh and sneer at crude theological ideas I never could endure. On the principle of evolution every such idea can be accounted for and respected; and the entire literature of caricature and ridicule, so plentiful in Atheistic fields, is utterly unworthy of sane, just reason. I am free to admit that Atheism has done good service in criticizing Theism and in making it give a reason for itself; but I am constrained to assert that, as a philosophy it wants spiritual insight. It will, in order to live at all, require to be transformed and adjusted to the revelations of modern science; but I think there is no future for it, and its place will be taken by an Agnosticism whose spirit is one of a devout sadness, and which will at length yield to the higher theism which will be as spiritual as it is scientific.

Though my conception of the Bible had been entirely changed by my experiences in the cave of Atheism, and though I saw that the knowledge of the living God was to be derived from his manifestations in Nature, I was still deeply interested in the Scriptures and desirous of knowing how to interpret them truly. Hearing of Swedenborg's way of dealing with them, I undertook the study of his voluminous writings. I found it very difficult to get into the sphere of the great

mystic's thought. I was chiefly interested in his view of the Bible, Jesus and the Future Life. Regarding the former I found his view to be that the Old and New Testaments are allegories, figurative writings, expressive of spiritual truths. The first chapters of the Old Testament, under the form of an historical account of the creation of the natural world, the fall of man, and the almost total extinction of the race, describe the beginning, the decay, and the termination of a spiritual creation; or of the establishment and decline of the earliest Church among men. The words of the Bible must not be taken as literal truths, but as signs having an inner meaning. The whole book must be read in view of the doctrine of correspondences—that is, with the idea that there is, from beginning to end, and in all its parts, a continuous spiritual sense founded on the correspondence between spirit and matter. For example, Cain means faith; Abel, charity; a horse, carnal understanding; a tree, perception, etc. This spiritual sense is the primary thing and must always be kept in view. Because he thought they were deficient in spiritual sense, Swedenborg excluded from the canon of Old Testament Scripture, Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon; and from the New Testament, the Acts and the Epistles. Though I perceived that proper words

are signs of natural facts, and that Nature is the symbol of spirit, I thought Swedenborg's conception of the *Word* was arbitrary. It loaded the Bible with a burden it could not bear. It took away the naturalness, the simplicity, the human truthfulness of it. It made the writers of Scripture the manufacturers of elaborate cyphers, the constructors of 'exact allegories.' The natural history of the Bible forbids belief in the theory; it shows us that the Bible is not a series of mystic signs which can only be read by special spiritual illumination, but is simply a series of literary productions expressive of Hebraic thought, to be read in the light of common understanding.

Still less could I agree with the Swedish Seer in his conception of Christ. The declaration of Swedenborg in this regard is, there is but one God and his name is Jesus Christ. God is Man, perfect and infinite man in form, and Jesus is Immanuel, or God with us and God for us. That idea seemed worse than the idea of the Trinity: it introduced a fresh puzzle, viz., how Jesus, that is to say the being who lived and died in Judea, could be the only God. It seemed arbitrary also. Why make Jesus the only God? Why not Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, or even Zoroaster or Buddha? It appeared to me to be an utter confusion of the human and the divine to say that Jesus was the only God. I asked myself, to whom did

Jesus refer when he spoke of 'the Father'? Was it to himself, or to some one else? I could understand the idea of manhood (that is, the spiritual qualities of manhood) being in God; I could say, in a mystic sense, God is Man, just as I could say, God is the Universe, but I could not in any literal sense accept the statement that Jesus is the only God.

Nor could I accept Swedenborg's teaching regarding heaven and hell. In the latter he made every evil thing eternal and consigned to it some of the best men our world ever had. There was no conversion for an evil spirit; when he passed into the world of spirits a man went to the place for which he had prepared himself, and remained therein forever enjoying it. It was the hell of Calvin, but without its torture: the devils enjoyed their devilry; they were, in a very low sense, happy. I could not endure the thought that God could give up spirits to such eternal grossness.—I found afterwards in Emerson my own impressions of Swedenborg—'Strange, scholastic, didactic, passionless, bloodless man, who denotes classes of souls as a botanist disposes of a carex, and visits doleful hells as a stratum of chalk or hornblend! He goes up and down the world of men, a modern Rhadamanthus in a goldheaded cane and peruke, and, with nonchalence and the air of a referee, distributes souls. His spiritual world is indeed very like, in its endless power of lurid pictures, to

the phenomena of dreaming, which nightly turns many an honest gentleman, benevolent, but dyspeptic, into a wretch, skulking like a dog about the outer yards and kennels of creation.'

I could not become a follower of Swedenborg, though I learned much from him. In him I found an antidote to secularistic materialism. He resolved everything into spirit. Much of his idealism I found fanciful, but the attempt to understand it developed my idealistic faculties, and made it impossible that I could be a materialist. He taught me that God created the Universe from Himself; that the desire of his love to give of its own to others, to give itself, is the moving cause of creation; that God gives man to be his own, to be himself,—a man; that God creates men to be active and co-operant instruments of his; to be men, who in their own freedom, and in their own strength, which is given them to be their own, do his work as their own work. In this they are angels and Christs.

I learned also that *externals* are created by *internals*; all the various things about us, which together compose our human world were created through and by the things within human minds, or the thoughts in their understanding, and the affections in their will. The external world of mankind is therefore the common resultant of the thought and affection of mankind throughout an indefinite period, and is 'vested in enduring matter which gives it a measure of permanence.'

I regarded that as a most valuable idea. Man makes his own world by means of his thoughts and affections. It delivered me completely from the coerciveness of Calvinism by which men are doomed to do what they do by fatalistic divine propulsion. It established human responsibility, gave man the power to reform, and made progress possible. And it seemed to me that, in the course of his development, man, by experience of effects, would learn how to make a good world. 'He is to convert all impediments into instruments, all enemies into power; there is nothing he will not overcome and convert, until at last culture shall absorb the chaos and gehenna. He will convert the Furies into Muses and the hells into benefit.'

Thus Swedenborgianism prepared me for the acceptance of the Evolutionistic philosophy, which I then had not directly studied. Secularism and it together led my mind up to that. But I had yet a good many stages to go through. I was still searching for a clue to the interpretation of the Bible, and for a solution of my theological difficulties. I wanted 'a new synthesis; a general idea which would co-ordinate all the facts and manifestations of life, all the aspects of the human problem, and all the branches of human knowledge that are ranged beneath it.'

I turned to Broad Churchism to see what I could find there. What I found I must describe very briefly. It came to me in the persons of Caird,

Gilfillan, and Walter C. Smith, and in the sermons of Robertson of Brighton. I found in it a pleasing liberalism of feeling, a sentimentalism which was charming, and a larger hope which was an education. These men had given up the idea of the plenary, mechanical, and rigid inspiration of the Bible. They said the Bible is not, but contains, the word of God; that the Trinity does not mean three persons in the Godhead, each a God, but three manifestations of God; they regarded the Atonement, not as a transaction affecting and changing God—reconciling Him to man—but as affecting and changing man—reconciling him to God—and working that change by a real transformation of soul and character through the divine infusion of Christ's own filial spirit; and they cherished the larger hope. They preached a modified Calvinism, a theology without harshness, a religion which was 'morality touched with emotion.' They emphasised the *love* of God, laid more stress on conduct than on belief, and sought to reform the Creeds. Their leading idea was *Culture*—the education, development, ennoblement of mankind. They had caught the enthusiasim of humanity, the earnestness for reality, the passion for loftiness which had been expressed by Carlyle and others of the heroic school; and on young men their preaching had a thrilling and rousing influence. It stirred them to feel if not to think, to believe in their best thoughts and holiest aspirations, and to

arise to be in some noble fashion. I caught the heroic fever, and fervently sought to become something real. But the question still was—what? Out of what fuel was the fire of fervent enthusiasm to come? The sentiment of heroism was good; but on what principles was heroism to be nourished? It seemed to me that Broad Churchism was a transitional thing, a half-way house between dogmatism and free thought, a bridge between superstition and science. There was nothing radical, definite, permanent in it. It pointed to something beyond. I saw that its declaration, 'The Bible is not the Word of God, but the Word of God is in the Bible,' was a hollow compromise. In what sense is the Word of God in the Bible? How much of it is there? How can we recognise it! And its declaration that the Trinity meant three manifestations of God was arbitrary. Why say *three* manifestations? Why not *seven*, or any other number?

Further, with regard to the Atonement, I asked, why was there need for a super-natural scheme at all? Had nature not sufficient means? And then the ominous question returned, Is there eternal torment or not? The *hope* that God would not inflict torment was not enough for me: I wanted a God to whom eternal torment would be an utter impossibility, else I could not worship. And so, while charmed by Broad Church sentiment, thankful for its sweetness, and the richer for its inspiration, I felt I must go further to find a deeper,

more scientific, and more permanent faith. And as I took my pilgrim staff in hand once more I heard a voice speak to me in words which I rehearse now for the pilgrim soul :—'God, by breathing into you a breath of his life, has decreed that you also are of worth. His works are your teachers: were it not so, would he have spread them around you? Seek in them his design, a syllable of the conception which is the soul of creation. Study that conception, without foolish pride or hypocritical modesty, in the history of collective humanity, throughout which he gradually reveals to us the law of progress prefixed by Him to life. Study Him, purifying your heart as a sanctuary from every base passion, guilty desire or idolatrous superstition, in the secret aspirations of your own soul, in those instincts of truth which spring up within you in supreme moments of devotion or affection; then when you have mastered that syllable of the law, caught that ray of the Divine Conception, rise, calm in conviction and strong in will, apostles of that which you know to be the aim of life. You are bound to raise, with deeper meaning than of yore, the old Hussite cry, *The cup for all*! and either conquer, or die that others may conquer.'

CHAPTER III.

FIRST VIEW OF THE REGION OF RELIGIOUS RATIONALISM—BEGUILED INTO THE BY-PATH OF LATITUDINARIANISM—STRUGGLES TO FIND MYSELF DEFINITELY SOMEWHERE.

At an early stage of my pilgrimage one truth came to me with the force of a divine conviction, viz., that the religious life should be a personal, proportionate, and progressive life—that is to say, it should, with each individual, be worship rising up from his own soul, and consecration of his own endowments, the devotion of his own life; not the life of his intellect alone, but also of his affections and his activities; and a continuous growth in knowledge and in character.

It appeared to me that the design of Christ was to get each one to enhallow his own personality, to regard his selfhood as sacred, to *come to himself* in self-knowledge and self-reverence. It was also his desire to place the individual in direct relationship to God, to show each one how he could ex-

perience vital connection with God and have the life that is 'life indeed.' And I was persuaded through the study of Christ's utterances, that he sought to base religion on the spontaneous affection of the various faculties of human nature, on the love of the mind for truth, the love of the heart for goodness, the love of the soul for holiness; so that all the faculties would unite in worship, and religion would be proportionate.

And I saw that Christ left religious thought and experience open to development. Religion in the individual and in society is, as he taught, like leaven, like the power in a seed, like the process of understanding, a gradual progression, unfoldment, and realization.

Under the influence of Christ's teaching regarding the seed in the good ground of an honest heart and understanding mind, I determinedly resolved that my religious life should be lived in accord with my own deepest thoughts and feelings, or not at all. I sought to be able to look up and say '*My God*,' and to feel that I had my own life in God. This was not egotism, but was simply self-respect. I felt it to be my duty to sanctify myself, to make as much of the endowments I had as I could possibly do by culture. I dismissed the priest with his vicarious intervention, I put aside the standard with its dogmatic finality, I gave up the sacrament with its exclusive sanctity, and resolved to go forth alone with only my conscience as the reflector of God's light.

Of course, I knew that I should have to learn from others, to read what others searchers said they had found, but I was determined that I would not in any way be coerced to believe anything; that I would seek for facts and bow to their authority alone. In short, I suspended judgment till I had searched, studied, and sounded for myself. If I were personally responsible I must seek personally, know personally, and be convinced personally. My ancestors had not taken away my religious obligation, my Church could not discharge it for me: it was a thing I must fulfil myself.

With these ideas in my mind I journeyed on, keeping as fast hold as I could of the integrity of my soul. My way up to the borders of religious rationalism was slowly and laboriously made. I had little or no help. I was too poor to buy the books I needed, and for a while did not know of the books which could serve me. I spent my nights in solitary study endeavouring to discover the laws of thought and the facts of life. I had not only to find my own way, but to make my road-making tools, to pick up hints here and ideas there, and grope forward in the darkness as best I could. I was a stranger in the great city, was naturally reserved, could hardly ever (in the period with which I am dealing) afford more than a shilling for a book, and there was no free library. John Burroughs tells of a snake which tried to swallow a lizard. The lizard made itself a hoop

by taking hold of its own tail, and the snake went round and round and could find neither beginning nor end—nothing to catch at. I suppose I had in my reserve coiled myself up like the lizard. I had become utterly suspicious and sick of orthodoxy, had given up Arminianism, turned away from Atheism, taken all I could out of Swedenborgianism, and passed through Broad Churchism, and almost began to despair of ever getting out of the wilderness.

Thoreau says, ' we need the tonic of wildness, to wade sometimes in the marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe, to smell the whispering sedge, where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We must be refreshed by the sight of unexhaustible vigour, vast and Titanic features--the sea coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and decaying trees, the thundercloud, and the rain which lasts.' For two or three years I wandered amidst vast, Titanic, wild, and misty things. The vastness of nature appeared to me in an overwhelming fashion. I could not measure it or get foothold of understanding with it. God assumed

other proportions and aspects than the Catechism and even than the Bible had given him. He appeared to me, not in chapters and verses in a book, but in forces and laws in a Universe, and I had no instrument of comprehension by which I could grasp him. Life and duty grew large through the reading of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, and more than ever I felt the necessity of a working principle, of a clue to the meaning of things.

What I knew of Science was got from secularist teachers, and I did not like their interpretation. I wanted to get at the Theology of Science, but the Science of the Atheist had no Theology. Orthodox Theology cast out Science: called it ungodly and devilish. I sought to hear what Science said for itself, but its voice was far off. As for believers in God on the ground of Science—theologians who based their divinity on natural facts, I did not know of any. I had to toil on over rocks, through bogs and thickets, and across streams, trusting it was true that—

> 'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay
> But the high faith that failed not by the way.'

All the while I was busy with my New Testament. I put the narratives into classifications of my own making, noted the difference of the words in the several gospels, studied discrepancies, and gradually came to the conclusion that the four gospels could not be harmonized. Without any aid I discovered that the gospel according to John

was altogether unlike the others in its matter and style. The history in it was not the same, nor were the utterances of Christ the same in kind; it could not be historically unified with the others. It was not that the writer of the fourth gospel gave what the others had omitted, but what he gave could not be made to fit in with their accounts. Nor, so far as I could see, could any method of interblending bring the words of Christ in the fourth gospel into harmony with the others. The Christ of John was a being different from the Christ of Matthew, and which was the real Christ I could not tell. I knew nothing then of the history of the composition of the gospels, nothing of the several parties amongst the first Christians, nothing of the influence of Greek thought on Christianity; for such information was not commonly accessible. I found that, although I was perfectly familiar with the words of the New Testament, I knew nothing whatever about its origin, the circumstances in which it was produced, the causes of its differences; in fact, I was utterly ignorant of the things which alone could give me an intelligent understanding of the books composing it. I discovered that my respect for the Bible was superstitious, a thing of tradition and dictation. If I had been asked in what book, chapter, and verse, such and such words were, I could have answered readily. I could repeat correctly large portions of Scripture; but if I

had been asked where such and such an idea of God came from, how such and such a conception of Christ rose, I could not have answered. I had not been taught the Bible had a literary history and character. I perceived however that (to use the words of Robertson Smith) ' the first condition of a sound understanding of Scripture is to give full recognition to the human side, to master the whole situation and character and feelings of each human interlocutor who has a part in the drama of revelation. Nay, the whole business of scholarly exegesis lies with this human side.'

The radical defect of ordinary Bible training lies here—viz., in not enabling the common reader to understand the human side of the Bible, or, in other words, to follow its literary history. The Bible is put into the hand of the child with the declaration *This is the Word of God, inspired, true in every letter, infallible, the only guide to Heaven.* The declaration, with the debarment to criticism which usually accompanies it, shuts the child's mind, and coerces it to accept the traditional conception and interpretation. We have no right to prejudice the mind of a child in that way. The Bible ought to be left to speak for itself: its history should be shown, and each mind freely permitted to form its own judgment regarding it.

The result of my own prolonged, solitary, and difficult study of the words of Christ was at first

startling and then reassuring. So far as the style was concerned I perceived that the words of Christ were poetic, figurative, idealistic. They were not the hard, dry, dogmatic utterances of a Church lawyer, but the fresh, glowing, suggestive expressions of a poet-prophet. They were not meant as a quarry out of which stones for a dogmatic structure were to be cut, shaped, and built together, but rather to stand as a glorious mountain-range of thought lifting the mind to intercourse with the Highest. There would be no more fitness in chiselling Shakespeare's dramas into *Thirty-nine Articles*, or in shaping the poems of Burns into a *Shorter Catechism*, than there is in the attempt of orthodoxy to cut its granitic *Standards* out of the poetry of Christ.

I took great pains to compare the words of Christ with the words of the Confession of Faith and the two Catechisms; I carefully noted the so-called proofs quoted in these documents from the words of Christ, and found that there was not a shred of support in the Gospels for the dogmas of the Standards. From 'the fall' on to 'eternal torment' I found the statements of the Standards without support in Christ's teaching. They appeared to me to be utterly un-Christian. I made up my mind therefore that Jesus Christ was not a Calvinist, and that Calvin was not Christ's true interpreter. There were dark things in his teaching: things on which I had no light

at all. But there were many things clear, sunny, and cheering. The Fatherliness of God, the moral equality of men, the divineness of reason, the sacredness of personal endowment, atonement with God by obedience to natural law, the sanctification of self, and a door to God perpetually open to all; these shone like bright stars in the sky of Christ's gospel. That I discovered by my own study of the firmament of Christ's teaching.

But now I wanted to verify these things, to find if Nature justified them, if Christianity were really God's truth. There were things in the letters of Paul which appeared to be contrary to the teaching of Christ, and I sought to know which was right. I was disposed to believe Christ in preference to Paul; but ought I to prefer him? What warrant was there in the nature of things for the declarations of Christ? Had Christianity Science under it as a sure foundation!

I used to haunt stalls of old books in hope that I might pick up cheap books of the kind I required, and one day my eye fell upon a soiled and torn book in paper covers with the title, 'The Works of Theodore Parker, Minister of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Church, Boston, U.S., in eight volumes, Volume I.' I had never heard of Theodore Parker, but I glanced through the book. There was a sermon in it on *The relation of Jesus to his age and the ages*, and I saw that it was the sort of thing I had been hungering

for. My eye caught such words as these—'his doctrines, *these great truths of nature*.' 'Apostolical and other *legends* tell of his divine birth . . . . to me they are not truth and fact, but mythic symbols and poetry; the psalm of praise with which the world's rude heart extols and magnifies its king . . . that God has yet greater men in store I doubt not; to say this is not to detract from the majestic character of Christ but to affirm the omnipotence of God . . . Methinks I hear that lofty spirit say to you or me, poor brother, fear not nor despair. The goodness actual in me is possible to all. God is near thee now as then to me; rich as ever in truth, as able to create, as willing to inspire.'

With eager trembling I spent my treasured shilling on the book, and carried it home with the feeling that I was about to be led out of the wilderness into the spiritual Canaan of my hopes. I was so anxious to get at the strange words that I read all the way home, choosing the quietest way. By the time I got home I was in a new world—the world of rational religion, of learned, free, critical yet reverent and loving faith in God. I read the precious book over and over again, and the longer I studied it the more I felt drawn to the views in it. I had never read any religious utterances that were so strong intellectually: there was a power of mind in them of the mightiest kind, an intense reasonableness, a glowing emotion,

a sublime spirituality far beyond anything I had ever met with in religious literature. The combination of rationalistic judgment with confident trust in God, of keen criticism and ardent reverence of Christ, of undogmatic thought and settled convictions, was strange to me. I had met with rationalists before, but they were Atheistic; I had heard Secularism advocated, but in order to replace religion; I had listened to denunciations of dogmatism in the interest of indifference to God and Christ; but here was religious rationalism of the most determined, strongest, and devoutest sort, and it was new and welcome to me.

Moreover, this American preacher's word was the most practical I had ever read. I had gone in spirit with Carlyle through the world of shams, applauded his sarcastic exposures of the shows of society and his tearing up of old Church clothes, but still was left in the wilderness. But in Parker I found a positive moral inspiration, which gave new life to my soul and opened up the way before me. His human sympathies were infectious. Religion with him began with respect for the human. Love of God was love of the divine in man. His sermons on *Poverty; The Perishing Classes in Boston; The Dangerous Classes in Society*, opened my mind regarding social economy, and awoke in me an enthusiasm for the service of humanity which has burned in me ever since. It was impossible to read his

fervent and strenuous utterances without being thrilled to the very soul; I was captivated by them. This mighty preacher had found me out and brought to me the very food, light, air, and life I longed for but knew not where to find, and I was overjoyed. He revealed me to myself: imaged my needs, reflected my ideals, inspired my desires. At last I had found a guide. But who was he? Were there others like him? Was there a Church that held his views?

I applied to the sceptical friend of whom I spoke in the previous chapter. He informed me that Theodore Parker was a Unitarian Minister. *Unitarian!* What is that? I had not consciously thought of the term before. My friend explained, and I said to myself, '*Then I am a Unitarian*, for I believe what Parker says.' I took my friend into my confidence, and told him how I had been wandering. He advised me to go on until I was fully satisfied in my own mind, and gave me much help. I resolved, therefore, to see for myself what Unitarianism was. I went to the St. Vincent Street Unitarian Church, Glasgow, and heard George Dawson preach. My experience was almost overwhelming. I had entered the place with great anxiety of soul. Was I to be once more disappointed, or would spiritual satisfaction come at last? The first hymn settled it. It was such a hymn as I had dreamt of and had tried to make for myself, was fervently sung, and with all my

heart I joined in it. I felt that if such were the true expressions of Unitarian religious faith I need not fear it. The prayer, the succeeding hymns, and the discourse confirmed the impression, and I thanked God that he had led my soul to its home at last. I had the feelings of being reborn in spirit into a new world, and for a new life.

In the impulse of my experience, I vowed that I would connect myself with the Unitarian body at once. But my mother was opposed to it, and there were other opposing influences of the strongest possible kind, which I permitted, I am sorry to say, to hinder me for a while from taking the step which I was persuaded I ought to take. I knew that the step would be a fateful one. It would then have caused a breach between my mother and myself, and would also have necessitated the breaking off of another engagement on the fulfilment of which I had set my heart. I told my mother frankly that if I did not attend the Unitarian Church I would not go to any other, for I had done with orthodoxy altogether. Seeing my determination, she frequently accompanied me in the evening to hear Mr. Crosskey preach, and gradually her opposition was dissolved.

But then there came to Glasgow a man who created a great stir for a time, viz., Dr. Hately Waddell; and the friend of whom I have spoken enticed me to hear him. I was charmed with

his vehement eloquence, and became enamoured with the idea of setting up a Church without any theological denomination in which there would be complete mental freedom. I took Hately Waddell for a Scottish Theodore Parker. On the wave of excitement I was carried into close connection with the movement which was begun under the title of *The Christian Union for the Church of the Future*. Dr. Waddell was a man of very marked and strong individuality, an eclectic in theology, a splendid rhetorician, and an author of no mean repute. His eloquence attracted thousands to the City Hall in which he preached, but the attempt to settle his congregation in a Church failed. It is not possible to find a single term by which to describe the theological position which Dr. Waddell occupied then. There was something in him of the Hebrew Prophet, something of the Scotch Covenanter, something of the German Transcendentalist, and something of the New England Puritan. He declined to take any sectarian name, to formulate any creed, or to limit himself in any way. His preaching was original in matter and in style, and was very exciting.

But though I became deeply attached to him as a man and a friend, I soon found a want of definiteness and radicalness in his preaching. I was led to him mainly because I was informed that he was a Universalist, but he never expressly

proclaimed Universalism. His utterances were rhetorical, brilliant, imaginative, forceful, and charming, but they lacked the precision which I desired. My mind was all the while hungering for rational, philosophic, and definite religious food, and at last I broke away from his connection and joined the Unitarian body.

I knew in my conscience that I had kept back from this act for unworthy reasons. I had sacrificed my convictions to social prejudices, made religion a thing of convenience, and myself a moral coward. I tried to excuse my position to my conscience, but ultimately my whole nature rebelled against the desecration of principle and forced me into my true place. The last struggle was the most painful, and it involved feelings so strong and sacred that I cannot make it the subject of public talk. Those who have gone through a like struggle will know what it is for a man to have to do a thing against the wish of his nearest and dearest; and they will know how strong the temptation is to surrender to custom and make religion a thing of worldly interest. I must confess that I had my period of surrender; and I feel humiliated when I think of it. Perhaps my experience in the service of the Satan of Conformity was needful for the sake of my ultimate spiritual freedom. However, I can sympathize deeply with those who to-day are similarly situated and tempted.

I know the full force of kinship and domestic influence when it stands against a mind on the move ; I know the insidious nature of the excuses which the conscience is apt to make to itself in yielding to social pressure, but still I am disposed to maintain the principle that no social tie, no blood relationship, no domestic influence ought to come in between a man and his convictions. A man's first and most sacred duty is to his conscience : that ought to take perpetual precedence of all other duties. If a man is false to himself he cannot be true to anything. Christ did not put it too imperatively when he said, 'He that will not leave father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren for my sake and the gospel's, cannot be my disciple.'

The principle implied in these words is this—religion is a relationship between the individual and God based on self-consecration. The allegiance of the soul belongs to God alone, and transcends all other obligations in its authority. Religion is not a thing of fashion, convenience, or conventionality, but of principle, conviction, and personal adjustment.

There ought to be amongst human beings a mutual understanding to the effect that there should be no coercion of thoughts or action, that no over-bearing pressure should be applied to the conscience, that no sort of constraining influence ought to be permitted in matters per-

taining to religion. Not only in the Church and in Society, but in the Home should religious freedom be maintained. The husband should not be expected to yield to the wife, nor the wife to the husband; each should respect the other's mental rights.

However socially painful it may be, husband and wife should go separate in religious belief if they are called by conscientious differences to do so. Nature's unity exists in diversity, and it is the law of faculty that the masculine and the feminine shall be distinctly specialized. Let the man think for himself, and the woman for herself, and when both are in earnest for the truth there will be spiritual unity between them.

There is no sort of faithlessness more fatal to religion than that which proceeds from mental surrender to social relationships, and which is so common; and it is time that the principles of religious freedom were realized and maintained in all social connections. We boast of our religious liberty, of the victories our fathers won in defence of the rights of conscience; but while we are freed from the dictation of kings and priests, we have gone into slavery to each other. We have made ourselves the slaves of fashion, of society, of worldly interest, and are gregarious in religion. We are members of a certain sect because our fathers were members of it, because our relatives wish it, or because it is fashionable

and profitable. Although religion is the one thing in which conscience and conviction ought to be manifest, it is of all things the one in which men stifle conscience. If men gave proper effect to their deepest convictions, orthodoxy, fashions in religion, gregariousness in religious professions would speedily come to an end.

The radical error in this respect is the setting up of a dogmatic creed which all must believe, the supposition that the Word of God is to be found wholly in a single book, the fancy that truth is the monopoly of a particular sect. If men could but see that knowledge is progressive, that fixed and final ideas are disallowed; that the Word of God is as wide as Nature and as fresh as life, and that the Bible is but one of many human interpretations of that Word; that truth is the verity of universal facts apprehended and assimilated by the mind, and therefore is common to all who see things rightly, there would be an end of sectarianism, bigotry, and intolerance. In fact the idea of toleration is a superstition. Each mind has the right to be itself as much as any element in Nature has the right to be itself; and we might as well think of the rock tolerating the plant or of the plant tolerating the insect, as of one man tolerating the convictions of another. Toleration implies the existence of intellectual superiority. There ought to be democracy in thought, perfect equality of mental rights, freedom

for each conscience to have its own convictions and its own method of action. Our duty is not to *tolerate* differences in thought but to create, cherish, and conserve them. The object of religious thought is infinite and requires a myriad-mindedness on the part of man to think it out.

When any man surrenders his own mind to the tyranny of domestic or social influence, or to anything else, he defrauds humanity of so much mental power, originality, and personal service. It is our business to encourage each other in the culture of personal endowment, to foster the growth of individual characteristics, to specialize each others powers as much as possible so as to bring out all the possibilities of human nature. We are not here to be copies and repetitions, stereotypes of each other, but to be different from each other, each one with his own well-developed personal power uniting sympathetically with others equally developed for the great purpose of life. It is therefore the duty of the parent to help the child to attain to a proper selfhood; of the husband and wife to respect and preserve each other's holiest characteristics; of human beings to develop individuality, however diverse, and in their diversity to maintain unity.

I have spoken thus of personal religious liberty in relation to domestic and social pressure, because it appears to me that we require a fresh movement for religious freedom. Mental slavery has settled

in the home, and we require to sound in the ears of men the old words, 'I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. . . . He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.'

I know by full experience what these words mean, for when I at last shook off the bondage of social influence and went finally away from orthodoxy and all its belongings, I did so at the sacrifice of almost every friend I had. It cost me everything, in fact, in a worldly sense. But I took the step, rescued my conscience, and felt myself a spiritual freeman. I hardly dare say how many years it took me to come up to the point of calling myself a Unitarian and giving myself to the Unitarian Cause. I am ashamed that I wasted so many years in dallying with duty, and if my voice could reach all those who are playing fast and loose with conscience, who permit themselves to be tied to orthodoxy while their convictions have other affinities, or who from any cause hesitate to follow their highest leadings, I would say, as persuasively as I can, 'Hesitate no longer; tamper no more with conscience, but go with it willingly and faithfully wherever it leads. What you lose in worldly honour you will gain in spiritual worth; what

you sacrifice in money you will recover in manhood. It will be of no advantage to you though "you gain the whole world and lose your own soul."'

On reviewing my position as a member of Dr. Waddell's congregation I found that intellectually it was one of ineffective compromise: what the congregation stood for was never very clear. It was a church with a person for a centre; an association dominated by an individual. When I thought of it, I saw that the basis was wrong. Men ought to associate on principle, to devote their united personalities to the service of an idea or of ideas; and the dominant thing should be their ideal, and not the man representing it. Persons are for the embodiment of principles, the expression of ideas; the establishment of true conditions. Principles are more than men. Ideas should rule men. And ideas require to be rationally defined and formulated ere they can command men. An association of religious men should not have a creed, but it should have definitely-expressed ideas, principles clearly set forth, a cause plainly understood.

And so I sought to escape from a latitudinarianism which had no definite idea, no positive principle. It was with difficulty that I cut myself away from Dr. Waddell's strong personal influence; but I felt I had to do it. I wanted expressly to know, if God is not a Trinity, is he a Unity, or

what? Was Christ divine or human? What really is the Bible? I wanted to have rational ideas of Sin, Salvation, Heaven and Hell, to know exactly what I meant when I spoke of Revelation, Inspiration, Incarnation, Atonement, etc., to get, in short, at the philosophy of religion. I sought for definite principles to which to give myself, to be able to realize that I stood somewhere with true thought, and that, in relation to a worthy cause, I was something. I sought for a Church that did not fear philosophy, nor, in the face of modern science, aimed 'to re-establish the dreams and fables of a ruder day; a Church that had leaders who will not look back, but forward, that would fan the first faint sparkles of that noble fire just newly kindled from the skies; not smother them in the ashes of fires long spent; not quench them with holy water from Jordan or the Nile.' I was weary of the Church that 'believes only in past inspiration and appeals to old books as the standard of truth and source of light; that is antiquarian in its habits; that calls its children by the old names; that wars on the new age, not understanding the man-child born to rule the world.' I was ready and eager for a Church that 'believes in inspiration now, and appeals to God's manifestations; that tries things by reason and conscience; that aims to surpass the old heroes; that baptizes its children with a new spirit, and uses the present age as the preparation for the fuller future.'

That Church I found, and in it was thought worthy of its ministry; and in its service I hope to spend my life. Let those who have found it also love it well, and let those who are ready for it enter it with welcome, for it is the Church that has in it the promise and potency of high service and lasting life!

CHAPTER IV.

THE RIGHT WAY AT LAST.

THE words of Christ, 'Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?' sounded in my ear many a time as I tried to find which, for me, was the right way in religion. And now as I review the method and recall the principle by which I ultimately decided regarding the right way, I am reminded of the words of Heine—'One cannot tell the truth about oneself. No one has as yet succeeded in doing it.' There comes also to my mind the anecdote of the African monarch who, when about to have his portrait painted, asked very seriously if he could not be painted white. I do not wish to colour my narrative otherwise than truly, to take any credit to myself for mental courage or extraordinary ability of any kind; but yet I am aware of a danger of throwing back a reflection of thought to an earlier stage of intellectual development than that to which it really belonged. I cannot quite separate

the mental stages of my pilgrimage, because I find that there were thoughts which ran through all the stages, and that my mental growth was an evolution which proceeded along certain lines laid in my very nature.

The earnestness with which I sought the real truth was the determination of the desire of right belief and good doing with which my mind was early furnished. I am willing to admit that there is much truth in the declaration made by Froude in his address on Calvinism—'Whatever exists, at this moment, in England and Scotland, of conscientious fear of doing evil is the remnant of the convictions which were branded by the Calvinists into the people's hearts'; for I am deeply sensible that the fear of thinking, doing, or being evil which was branded into my heart by early training made me restlessly anxious to be certain that I was thinking, doing, and being *right*, and that the influence of the serious and severe Calvinists of whom I spoke in my first chapter, who wrestled with their natural affections from day to day and crucified their rebellious intellect, went deep into my soul and made me in earnest to be convinced of the truth. With an unappeasable intellectual hunger I pursued the right. But how to judge with myself what is right was the difficulty. What test would reveal the right? according to what standard of judgment was the right to be ascertained?

I had had at different stages of my pilgrimage several standards put into my hands; first, the Shorter Catechism; then, the Larger Catechism, and afterwards the Confession of Faith. One after another of these I rejected because they appeared to me to be unscriptural and irrational. Then I came to the Bible. By the same method of examination I found that it was not an infallible and ultimate standard of right. The Bible refers its readers to something external and prior, and appeals to the rational faculty in man. It constantly suggests Nature as the basis of its statements regarding God; and it is to the test of Nature that we must bring its theology. It is from Nature that Biblical ideas of God are taken; and it is in terms supplied by Nature that God is spoken of in the Bible. Without Nature as an objective reality we could not have any ideas whatever. All our conceptions are really receptions of Nature's communications. The Bible is simply a series of interpretations of God's action in Nature and Man addressed to the reason and understanding of its readers. It can have no meaning or authority for a rational being till reason has recognized its significance and worth. Thus, the Bible comes to us as beings related to Nature, and points us to Natural Authority. There was no supernaturalness in its origin, nor has it any finality, but is a product of natural influences, and leaves its readers with the power

that works through Nature, moulding man. On reflection I saw plainly enough that each individual has the very same right to form his own idea of God which each of the writers of the Bible had. They did not foreclose the way to God, but only showed the path they themselves took. Nature is as open to us as it was to them; reason is with us as well as it was with them; we are actually as near to God as they were. Consequently our theology, our religion, our life with God should be our own, just as our physical characteristics and our place in history are our own.

I perceived, therefore, that the Infinite Being with whom I had to do religiously is the God of Nature, and that I had no other testimony of Him but that which the order of Nature supplied. I recognized in the facts of Nature and the truths of conscience the basis which God himself had laid for religion and morality. With that recognition I felt that I stood upon the Rock of Ages. I knew with certainty that if I accepted natural facts and assimilated them truly with mind and heart I could not but be right. 'The ancients had an axiom that he who knew one truth knew all truths; so much else becomes knowledge when one vital fact is thoroughly known. You have a key, a standard, and cannot be deceived.' *God in Nature seeking to communicate with the rational Man* became to me a vital fact, and in it I had the key to all God's Revelation; and I

knew my duty as a being having the endowment of reason.

On arriving at that position I was convinced that it was the right one, for it was the only reasonable position. It was not arbitrarily chosen, but was one to which I was led as the resistless result of long continued thought. And I knew it was the right position, because there I felt myself owned, claimed, and used by a Divine Power; that my mind and heart and soul were possessed by a Divine Principle; that my individuality was consecrated by a Divine Calling. I had come to myself as a living person in vital relations with the Living God. To me God was not one who was in a past age, whom Moses knew, and with whom Isaiah had communication; but one who is in the present, whom the men of to-day may know, and with whom the earnest soul anywhere may have communication. And the important thing for me was not the interpretation of the Bible, but the interpretation of the Universe. Biblical statements gave way to natural phenomena; texts were subordinate to facts; the scientist took precedence of the divine. God was brought nearer; all life was full of him; and religion was the spontaneous emotion of the soul in his felt presence.

On entering Unitarian territory I felt a mental satisfaction far above anything I had ever felt before. I had all along been most anxious to

be true to the best I knew and to preserve my holiest affections, and I had the consciousness in passing the boundary of separation between the old thought and the new that I had not left anything vital behind. I had not dropped religious reverence, but actually had in my soul an intensified awe of the Infinite. Jesus Christ was not less but more than he had been. The Bible had not ceased to interest and instruct, but was even more precious than ever because better understood. I felt that I had made a distinct advance and realized a clear spiritual gain, for I was conscious that I had reason with me, and that I could now let affection have free play in religion, and have no fear in going forward. For the first time in my existence I felt that I was spiritually alive, that there was divine life for every faculty of my nature, and that God had actually a use for me. It was the consummation of feeling I had long devoutly wished to have, and having it, my soul was overjoyed.

On becoming a member of St. Vincent Street Church I took full advantage of the excellent library of the Church, and eagerly read the works of leading Unitarians. It did not take me long to master the Unitarian position, for my prolonged search and study had naturally led me up to it. There was no cataclysm in my conversion. My pilgrimage had been a continuously forward movement, a slow but sure evolution. Though I

was trained amidst Calvinistic influences I never really was a Calvinist in belief. I simply was in the Calvinistic ranks by birth and education, but from that period of conscious conviction I had my doubts of Calvinism. The fifteen years which I had of wandering in the wilderness were really years of progressive approach to Unitarian thought. I remember well what my first distinct impressions of Unitarians were. They were very strange persons. They were strong believers in God, while they most decidedly refused to state their theology dogmatically; they rejected the orthodox view of Jesus Christ, and yet in orthodox literature there was no such expression as theirs of admiration of Christ and of loyalty to him; they did not regard the Bible as the ultimate authority in religion, and yet they used it in their Churches; they admitted the guilt of sin, but would not go to Christ's blood with it; they would rather go to hell to relieve or suffer with the lost than go to heaven to sing with the selfish; they believed in Revelation, Incarnation, Inspiration, Regeneration, etc., but not in the usual way; they declined to be regarded as sectarian, while they had special characteristics and definite aims; they were individualistic, yet brotherly; rationalistic, yet religious; decided, but not bigoted; progressive, yet holding fast to permanent principles; free in thought, yet strict in conduct; self-reliant, yet humble before God. It took me

some time to adjust myself with them. I had been taught that there were just two classes of persons in religion—the elect and the non-elect, the saved and the unsaved, the believer and the unbeliever. Someone tells of a flower-girl who classed flowers as those which had a pleasant and those which had an unpleasant smell. In somewhat the same way I had been taught to believe that all beyond the lines of orthodoxy were not only wrong in thought, but immoral in life. In order to protect a child from evil it was thought necessary to teach it the Shorter Catechism, and in order that a man might be kept from immorality it was thought needful that he should believe all the dogmas of orthodoxy. These were regarded as indispensable intellectual and moral safeguards. But I found amongst Unitarians the noblest manhood and the sweetest womanhood, though they had none of the mental furniture of the orthodox. I saw that virtue was not confined to orthodox circles, that high character could be attained in a heterodox atmosphere, that, in fact, the most Christly characters of the age were those of men and women whom Calvinists regarded as unbelievers and heathens. Amongst Unitarians I found men of the highest eminence in Science, Philosophy, Poetry, and Literature; statesmen, philanthropists, reformers, notable persons of all ranks whose character was of the highest kind. Indeed I found what I had been taught it was impossible to find.

One of the most effective scares which orthodoxy uses to frighten men away from inquiry and heterodoxy is the assertion that if they begin to doubt the truth of orthodox dogmas and to let go the faith of their Church they will inevitably descend the inclined plane and land in the pit of sin and perdition. I suppose there is a common impression that a Unitarian Congregation is composed of worldly and irreligious persons, or at the best, of good but eccentric people. And orthodoxy commonly attributes any good it sees in Unitarianism to the leaven of Trinitarianism in it. Unitarianism, it is said, still retains much of the virtue it took with it out of orthodoxy; but as that dies out it will lose all goodness and become a foul and evil thing. The imputation is without foundation. The tendency is all the other way. Orthodoxy makes so much of imputed and so little of personal righteousness that there is with it no incentive to high character. All the incentives it has are of a selfish and low order—a desire for personal safety, the fear of hell, or some such mean motive. But in Unitarianism the incentives and motives which operate on character are highly moral in their nature, and are fitted to produce the noblest type of manhood and womanhood. Life on principle, reverence for personal endowment, love of truth for its own sake, social responsibility; these are the reasons and motives which Unitarianism present for good

character, and these, when acted upon, produce nobleness of life. In changing the emphasis from dogmatic belief to integrity of character, Unitarianism has a great practical advantage over orthodoxy; and there is height and breadth and beauty enough in the idea of character set up by such teachers as Channing and Parker and Martineau to impel the soul that sees it to great efforts.

It was after I read the strenuous discourses of Parker, the thrilling sermons of Channing, and the philosophic writings of Martineau, that I most deeply felt the awfulness of human life, and was most powerfully impressed with the duty of self-santification. Their influence was as that of light and health and power to my soul; it braced my spiritual nerves, and created a desire for the high and noble. I think it is impossible to come under the influence of these great souls without having every faculty of mind and heart touched to finer issues.

My confirmed impression of Unitarianism as compared with Trinitarianism may be put thus— It is generally believed by Trinitarians that if they were to become Unitarians it must be by giving up every fundamental religious idea, cutting all connection with Jesus Christ, leaving every anchorage of the soul, and setting themselves adrift upon a heaving sea of doubt and denial, without a chart or compass, to be driven about by

every wind of faithlessness. But the truth is that Unitarians have not given up any essential religious verity, they have not disconnected themselves from Christ; they have an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast.

Unitarianism comprehends all that is good and true in other 'isms': it is the unification of the truths and virtues of all. In becoming a Unitarian a man need not sacrifice religion, but only the detected errors of religion; he need not let go any truth, but may expect to find truth in wider, higher, and more reasonable aspects. He will still have God, Christ, Revelation, At-one-ment, Eternal Life as realities, but with their reality deepened.

Unitarians have not separated from others for freedom to be less religious, but with the desire to be more truly religious; they have given up belief in dogmas, because they think the Infinite cannot be formed as a dogma; they have left the company of all other sections of Christendom, not because they have given up Christianity but because they seek to have it as Christ presented it, and in developed fulness.

They believe that they occupy a position in which a true unity in religion is possible—the position of reason, veracity, and progress. Ecclesiastically, they accept the principle underlying the idea of a National Church—viz., that religion is essential to true, full national life, but they would

have the nationalized Church one for the whole people, creedless, free, and adapted to the practical service of humanity. They stand with Dissenting Presbyterians against Erastianism, but they object to the popery of Presbyterianism.

Unitarians are at one with the Congregationalists in form of Church government, while they are free from the dictation and interference of a central 'Union.' With the Baptists, Unitarians believe that the decisions of religion should be 'the deliberate acts of an adult, responsible soul,' but they do not regard any particular form of baptism as essential.

Unitarians sympathize with the methodism and enthusiasm which Wesley left as a legacy to his followers, while they do not think that the dead hand of the master should suppress the living faculties of the disciple. Thus Unitarians touch other religionists at their vital points.

Doctrinally, Unitarianism has all the breadth of the *Broad Church* without its manifest defect of subscription to a creed; the respect of the *High Church* for a worthy and elevating worship, but not its sacramentarianism; the conservatism of the *Low Church*, but not its bondage to the out-grown.

No Protestants honour the right of private judgment in religion more than Unitarians, but they exercise it more thoroughly than any others. Unitarians believe in 'the decrees of God' as strongly as the Calvinist does, but they do not

believe that God has decreed anyone to eternal perdition. They rejoice with the Arminian in 'the free grace of God,' but they make it universal and effectual with all. They are at one with Quakers in 'seeking the ultimate source of religious authority in the witness of the Spirit ever freshly given to souls that live in communion with God,' but they do not sanctify silence or regard the action of God's Spirit as supernatural. They value 'spiritual discernment' as highly as the Swedenborgian, but they utilize it rationally. They have pleasure in going with the Universalists all the length they go, but they proceed further on the same lines. Whatever is essential in other forms of religious thought is comprehended in Unitarianism in a more advanced conception.

Theologically, the Unitarian comprehends more in the idea of God than the Trinitarian does. Trinitarians believe that the work of creation, salvation, and sanctification is done by *three* distinct persons; Unitarians believe that it is done by one God, in many ways, in different ages, and with various peoples. Unitarianism concentrates worship on one Infinite Being, and ascribes universal action and power to him alone.

The idea of the personality of Jesus Christ held by Trinitarians implies Incarnation. Unitarians believe that God is incarnate in Humanity, that in manhood God becomes flesh, that every man is 'a partaker of the divine nature.' They regard

Jesus Christ as the greatest illustration of Divine Humanity, or God's Incarnation, the examplar of man's Sonship in God.

The common notion of the Bible has the idea of *Revelation of God* underlying it. Unitarians believe in the Revelation of God, but to them it is universal and continuous, running through all scientific discovery and spiritual experience, and is extant always in the developed and verified knowledge of the race. The Unitarian cannot confine God's revelation to Judea, but is obliged to believe that it is as wide as life, and to recognize it in every natural object and in every word of truth.

The idea sought to be expressed in the popular conception of the atonement is that of a medium of communication and harmonization between God and man. Unitarians believe that such a medium exists naturally and universally. Every element, object, and law of Nature is a means of Divine Communication with Humanity, and every faculty of human nature is a mediator between man and God. The aspirations and experiences of the soul are the means of atonement with the Infinite.

Even the ideas underlying the dogmas of the devil and hell are comprehended in Unitarianism. These ideas are the terribleness, the subtlety, the malignity of evil, and the bitterness, the severity of the agony it brings upon the sinner. To the

Unitarian, Ignorance, Error, Sensuality, Selfishness, Hatred, and Hypocricy are the devil and his angels; and the darkened mind, the impure heart, the unfaithful conscience are hell.

Thus Unitarians differ from Trinitarians mainly in the developed form in which they embody the fundamental ideas of Religion. Unitarians do not reject any essential religious idea, but endeavour to unify and preserve all truth.

The comprehensiveness of Unitarianism fits it for universal acceptance. It is the religion of Nature and Humanity, the Christianity of Christ. Its Missionaries are men of science and all who are in earnest for righteousness. The mind of the time gravitates towards it. The radical philosophy of the age is its pioneer. Its leaven has found its way into every church and is working mightily. It stands before the religious thought and emotion of the age as the goal to which they will come when fully advanced. To-day Unitarianism is martyrdom; to-morrow it will be victory. *Now*, men confess it privately; anon they will profess it publicly. On the field of Theism, the Unitarian position seems to me to be the only rational one. I cannot conceive of any proper religion which is not based on Reason. Without enlightened Reason we could not possibly have any veracious thought or true action. It is just here—in its unification of the means of Religious Knowledge and Life—that the Unitarian

Church has its mission and power. There never can be theological unity of belief, or belief of real theological truth, till one criterion of truth is adopted by seekers after God.

Now, a little reflection will surely convince us that Reason is the one and only possible criterion. As thinkers and truth-seekers we naturally find ourselves placed thus—without us is the Universe, the object of our thought, and within us is the thinking faculty, the subject of thought. The case is constituted by these two—that which is not ourselves and that which is ourselves. These, as the counterparts of each other, stand continually face to face. 'In every act of our minds there are involved these two factors—Thought and its object, Ourselves and our Environments, Mind and Nature, the Soul and the Universe.' 'The effort of all search after truth is to find the true relation between the Soul and the Universe.' That is the problem of religion reduced to its simplest terms. The real problem is not, as orthodoxy puts it, to find the true relation between the Soul and the Bible, or between the Soul and Christ, but simply to find the true relation between the Soul and God as He is manifested in the Universe. The primary and perpetual relation of all human beings (whether they ever heard of the Bible or Christ or not) is to the Universe. Each one is part of it, was produced by the Divine Power that works through it, and his true life is

necessarily at-one-ment with the energies operating in it, and his radical responsibility is to the law of its order. We are in reality members of the Universe first of all, before we are members of a family, of a sect, or of society. Our primary, deepest, and most sacred relation is to God as He is manifested in Life. The ultimate authority, the most vital connection, the unescapable besetment is in the Universe.

Knowledge is the product of subjective and objective factors—of the mind and the Universe. There cannot be knowledge until the mind has been awakened into activity by the presence of objects to be cognized. Mind is the instrument of thought, and the things of the Universe play on the instrument. What, then, is the test of true thought?

Here is the Universe, ever the same in its manifestations, invariable in its laws, orderly in its phenomena, presenting to man perpetually the same duties, meeting him with the same methods, uttering the same message. And here is man, a dependent creature, undergoing a process of development, the child of his environment; how can the two be adjusted so that the Power in the Universe may truly report himself to man, and man truly understand the report? The revelation waits on the interpreter: how can he be sure that he interprets it truly? How can facts be distinguished from fancies, illusions from realities, truth from error?

Plainly the test of truth must lie in the mind itself. It is to it that things report themselves. To the sense of reasonableness in the mind things have to commend themselves. By its experience in research, experiment, and reflection the mind learns to interpret the message of Nature. 'Truth as it exists to-day is the organized experience, the deepened impressions of the past.' The universal and unchanging facts of Nature have impressed themselves most deeply on the mind, and by their persistency established their impression. They are the primitive rock of experience, the granite of the mind, the eternal basis of thought. They form a mental deposit which nothing can dissolve, and support a body of affirmations of which the negation is inconceivable. Reason, then, which is organized experience, is the only criterion of truth.

I found that the adoption of this principle marked off the Unitarian Church from all others. All others taught that reason was either naturally depraved or insufficient to lead man into all truth, and presented another authority—the Bible, the Standards, or the Pope. But neither of these authorities could appeal to an irrational being: their appeal must assume the ability to understand it, so that really reason is above these authorities. Nothing can be of proper authority except through Reason. 'Whoever tries to shake the authority of our natural powers, as the ultimate appeal in

their several concerns, though he may think himself a saint, is in fact an infidel. Whoever pretends that anything can be above them—be it a book or church—is secretly cutting up all belief by the roots. Whoever tells me that prophet or apostle set himself above them, and contradicted instead of reverently interpreting and rendering audible, the whispers of the highest soul, is chargable with fixing on the messengers of God the sure sign of imposture and wildness. To tell me, with warning against my erring faculties, that a thing is divine which offends my devoutest perception of the true and holy ; as well might you persuade me to admire the sweetness of a discord by abusing my sense of hearing, or to prefer a signboard to a Rafaelle by enumerating optical illusions and preaching on the imperfections of sight.'—(*Dr. Martineau.*)

On arriving at this conviction I found that I had reached a high altitude and stood upon an extensive table-land which was like a vast terrace, with flats, marshes, and wilderness below, and lofty hills towering at its westerly margin. I looked back upon the weary deserts, the dark thickets, the miry sloughs through which I had come, and was thankful that I had got above them all ; and forward with glad hope upon the glorious prospect which lay before me. The whole universe of truth was before, and I was free to seek and know. There were no bonds on the mind but those of

its own respect for its rational faculties and its reverence of facts. There was no penalty of thought, unless the trouble and difficulty and painfulness of thinking were such. All that science could discover, philosophy foretell, and poetry glorify was before me, and all the development of mind and heart and soul connected with its pursuits, lay ahead as a sublime experience.

Of my actual realization in the region of Unitarian thought and life I cannot now speak. I can only say that I was so much impressed with what I learned and saw that I resolved to give myself to the ministry of the Unitarian Church. That resolution was warmly approved of by the Rev. John Page Hopps, under whose influence I was mainly led to take it, and after a period of special preparation I became a minister. The thirty years which I have spent in preaching the Unitarian gospel have been the happiest, though at the same time, the most trying years of my life. The further I travel from the East the more the splendid vision of the soul brightens with me. My belief in God never was stronger and dearer than it is now. He is nearer to me than ever. I do not look for him in a distant region, in another world, or in a past age by speculation's glass or fancy's eye; I find him around me in the living Universe, as the Architect of its forms, the pulse of its forces, the director of its laws, the inner spirit of its beauty; and I

find him within me in the holiness of Conscience, and in the inspirations that divinely come to my soul. Worship of God is not a mere formality to me now, but a joyous recognition of an Infinite Spirit brooding kindly over my own. Prayer is the spontaneous outcry of my combined faculties for the vitalizing and sweetening energy of the Holy One. Religion I feel as an actual sympathy connecting me in desire, in aim, in life with the heart of God.

The more of life I see and know the more does the awe of living deepen within me. Being does not shrink and lose its interest to me as I grow older; it expands and becomes increasingly interesting. So far from deeming Life not worth living, I seek to live on still, to seek and work, and know. Though compelled by the force of Reason and Conscience to give up orthodoxy I do not feel myself a worse man. I am conscious that the change has made God greater, man dearer, and duty more august to me; and I am ready to spend and be spent in the service of humanity.

And so I can make my own the poet's song, 'At Eventide,'—

> 'Poor and inadequate the shadow play
> Of gain and loss, of waking and of dream,
> Against life's solemn background needs must seem
> At this late hour. Yet, not unthankfully,
> I call to mind the fountains by the way,
> The breath of flowers, the bird-song on the spray,

Dear friends, sweet human loves, the joy of giving,
And of receiving, the great boon of living
In grand historic years when Liberty
Had need of word and work, quick sympathies
For all who fail and suffer, song's relief,
Nature's uncloying loveliness, and, chief,
The kind restraining hand of Providence,
The inward witness, the assuring sense
Of an Eternal Good which overlies
The sorrow of the world, Love which outlives
All sin and wrong, compassion which forgives
To the uttermost, and justice whose clear eyes
Through lapse and failure look to the intent,
And judge our frailty by the life we meant.'

THE END.

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